

Chapter 1

Introduction

This document is the final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Bonneville Power Administration's (Bonneville's) proposed McNary-John Day Transmission Line Project. This document has been prepared as an "abbreviated" final EIS pursuant to the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations because there have been no substantial changes to the proposed action, alternatives, or environmental analysis presented in the draft EIS for this project. Consistent with 40 C.F.R. 1503.4(c), this abbreviated final EIS provides comments received on the draft EIS, agency responses to these comments, and changes made to the text of the draft EIS. This final EIS should be used as a companion document to the draft EIS (dated February 2002), which contains the full text of the affected environment, environmental analysis, and appendices. For readers of this final EIS who do not already have a copy of the draft EIS, copies of the draft EIS may be obtained by several means:

- calling Bonneville's document request line at 1-800-622-4520;
- sending an e-mail to Stacy Mason, Environmental Coordinator at slmason@bpa.gov; or
- accessing the document on Bonneville's web site at <http://www.efw.bpa.gov/cgi-bin/PSA/Introduction> (click on project links under "Environmental Projects").

The remainder of this introduction provides an overview of the proposed action and alternatives, the lead and cooperating agencies, the comment period for the draft EIS, and key changes to the draft EIS. Chapter 2 of this final EIS identifies the specific changes that have been made to the text of the draft EIS. Chapter 4 presents comments received on the draft EIS (organized by the chapters and sections of the draft EIS), as well as agency responses to these comments. Chapter 5 includes copies of comment letters, e-mails, telephone logs, and meeting summaries received on the draft EIS.

Summary of Proposed Action

Bonneville proposes to construct a 500-kilovolt (kV) transmission line from its McNary Substation to its John Day Substation, a distance of about 79 miles. The new line would begin at the existing McNary Substation in Umatilla City (Umatilla County, Oregon) near the Columbia River and cross the Columbia River into Washington between the McNary

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Dam and the Umatilla Bridge. The proposed line would then generally follow the Columbia River and State Route (SR) 14 west through Benton and Klickitat Counties. At the John Day Dam, the proposed line would cross back into Oregon and connect into the John Day Substation near Rufus (Sherman County, Oregon). The proposed line would generally parallel existing transmission lines in an existing corridor that runs between the McNary and John Day Substations. (Please see Vicinity Map.)

About 360 transmission towers would be needed to carry the wires (conductors) for the proposed transmission line. The towers typically would be 145 to 165 feet tall lattice steel towers with spans of 900 to 1,400 feet between towers. The towers would be similar to the towers of the existing lines that the proposed line would parallel. Each tower would occupy about 0.05 acre, with a temporary disturbance during construction of about 0.5 acre. In addition, a 1.3-acre expansion of the McNary Substation would be required to accommodate the line termination at this substation.

The new transmission line would require some upgrades to existing access roads (approximately 40 miles would need to be reconditioned and widened), construction of new access roads (about 8 miles of new road would need to be built), construction of new access road spurs (about 270 short spur roads, each about 250 feet long from an existing access road to a new tower), and some purchasing of new access road easement (for up to 30 roads in areas off of the right-of-way).

During the life of the project, Bonneville would perform routine, periodic maintenance and emergency repairs to the transmission line. Vegetation also would be maintained along the line for safe operation and to allow access to the line.

Summary of Alternatives

Bonneville is considering the Proposed Action, the No Action Alternative, and several short-line routing alternatives. The short-line routing alternatives are as follows:

- McNary Substation Alternatives – Alternative A - Relocate Building, Alternative B – Cross Wildlife Area, Alternative C - Bus Work in Wildlife Area;
- Hanford-John Day Junction Alternatives – Alternative A - North Side, Alternative B-South Side, Alternative C – South Side Highway;
- Corridor Mile 32 Alternatives – Alternative A - parallel existing line across tribal allotment, Alternative B – Move entire corridor off tribal property;
- Corridor Mile 35 Alternatives - Alternative A - parallel existing line across tribal allotment, Alternative B – Move entire corridor off tribal property.

**For security purposes,
maps and related graphics
have been removed
from the
electronic version
of this document.**

To obtain printed copies of these omitted items,
please contact the Environmental Lead for this Project:

Stacy Mason - KEC-4
Bonneville Power Administration
P.O. Box 3621
Portland, OR 97208

Lead and Cooperating Agencies

Bonneville is the lead agency under NEPA for the proposed action because Bonneville has proposed and would construct and operate the proposed transmission line. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Indian Affairs are cooperating agencies in the development of this EIS because of their roles as managers of lands crossed or a need to make findings on the project.

Draft EIS Comment Period

In early March 2002, Bonneville made three separate mailings regarding the draft EIS to approximately 500 interested or affected governments, agencies, organizations, and individuals.

- One mailing included the draft EIS, a cover letter, and comment form.
- A second mailing was sent to individuals who had requested the draft EIS Summary.
- A third mailing informed people that the draft EIS was available and how they could receive a copy.

In total, approximately 450 Draft EISs and 65 EIS Summaries were distributed. Bonneville also posted the draft EIS on its website, sent a news release to media in the project area announcing availability of the draft EIS and how to request a copy, and published a notice in the monthly *BPA Journal* that is mailed to customers and others interested in the agency's work.

Three open-house style meetings were held in April 2002. The public meetings were held in Oregon and Washington: April 8, 2002 – Hermiston Community Center, Hermiston, Oregon; April 9, 2002 – Paterson School, Paterson, Washington; and April 10, 2002 – Roosevelt School, Roosevelt, Washington.

Bonneville's Constituent Account Executives contacted governmental agencies and public interest groups to invite them to the public meetings and to offer opportunities for one-on-one discussion on the draft EIS.

Meetings with the Payos Kuus Cuukwe Cooperating Group (with attendance from the Colville Confederated Tribes, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Indian Nation, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and the Nez Perce Tribe) were held on February 7, 2002 (Walla Walla, Washington) and April 19, 2002 (Portland, Oregon) to discuss the draft EIS and to solicit comments.

The comment period officially closed on April 23, 2002, but Bonneville continued to accept comments through May 14, 2002 from agencies informing Bonneville that their

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comments would be late. Comment letters that were received after May 14, 2002 are printed in the final EIS and will be taken into consideration in the decision-making process, but Bonneville was not able to provide written responses to those comments in this final EIS.

Key Changes to the Draft EIS

The following summarizes the primary changes that have been made to the draft EIS. For a complete description of all changes to the draft EIS, please see Chapter 2.

- Provided an update on the Starbuck Power and Mercer Ranch Projects.
- Stated the Bonneville preferred and the environmentally preferred alternatives.
- Provided information on river tower crossings of the Columbia River at McNary and updated impacts and mitigation accordingly.
- Updated acreage of temporary disturbance from tower construction from 0.25 acre to 0.5 acre. Also updated all impact calculations (both in tables and text) as appropriate.
- Updated mileage of new access roads from 3 miles to 8 miles. Also, updated all impact calculations (both in tables and text) as appropriate.
- Updated width of disturbance from access roads from 50 feet for temporary and 16 feet for permanent to 25 feet for permanent and none for temporary. Also, updated all impact calculations (both in tables and text) as appropriate.
- Added information about potential blasting for tower construction.
- Provided additional information about Essential Fish Habitat.
- Provided additional information about the biological assessment for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NMFS.
- Provided results from vegetation survey of state sensitive plant species.
- Provided results of archaeological surveys conducted with the Yakama Nation and a summary of the oral histories conducted by the Warm Springs Tribe.